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MEMORANDUM ON DAGESTAN AND SHAMYL

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Dagestan (from the Turkic word dag, mountain) is the name of the northeastern region of the Caucasus with the adjacent coastal strip of the Caspian Sea. It is a rugged mountainous area, inhabited by a wide variety of races, belonging to about 30 Moslem ethnic groups, the largest of which ^{are} the Lesghians. Author or Sponsor
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Dagestan was attacked by Peter the Great during his invasion of Iran (1722-23), but managed to remain independent until the beginning of the 19th century when the tribes nominally recognized the supremacy of Russia. It required, however, long and persistent attempts on the part of Russia to break the resistance of the tribes, a resistance which lasted until 1864 and was much glorified in the Russian and Western literatures.

In 1829 Dagestan formed an "Imamate", extending over the neighboring regions of the Chechen and the Circassians, under the rulership of an "Imam", an elected, not hereditary, religious and secular leader. There were three "Imams", Ghazi Muhammed (1829-32), Gamzat Bey (1832-34), and Shamyl (1834-59). Shamyl (born about 1797, died 1871), a Lesghian, preached holy war against Russia and won full independence with the support of England and France during the Crimean War of 1853-55. He was an outstanding ruler and became the leading figure in the history of the Caucasus. He created a theocratic military political entity, dividing the country into administrative districts (naibates) under his governors (naibs) and introducing compulsory military service and certain social reforms. His rule was ended by the Russian General Prince Baryatinskii, who captured him at his mountain stronghold of Gunib (1859) and led him into captivity. He was held in custody first in Kaluga, then in St. Petersburg and Kiev. He died during

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a pilgrimage to Mecca in 1871. One of his sons served as an officer with the Turkish army and one in the Russian army.

By 1864 Dagestan was fully subjugated to Russia and integrated into its administrative organization. It ceased to be a political unit and many of the tribesmen emigrated to Turkey.

During the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78, while a Caucasian emigre force attacked the Caucasus, the Lezgians revolted again. They were beaten by the Russians.

During the Russian Revolution of 1917 the Caucasians sided largely with the anti-Communist forces. For a short time they formed an Emirate of the Northern Caucasus under the supremacy of the Ottoman Sultan. The country, however, was subdued by the Communists, suffering great devastation. The town of Khasav-Yurt and 60 villages were razed and the city of Derbent was largely destroyed.

At present, most of the historic area of Dagestan forms the Dagestan Autonomous SSR (13,000 sq. mi., 900,000 inhabitants), founded in 1920. In 1942 the German army reached its boundaries. When the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous SSR was abolished and the Chechen tribe of about 400,000 people were deprived of their political identity because of their lack of loyalty to the USSR, the eastern part of Chechnia was included (1944) into the Dagestan Republic.

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